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# Bard

## THE ELEMENTS OF POETRY

It should be formal as water  
is, obedient  
to every contour of what is  
yet in generous authority  
leave every surface changed by its touch.

Formal as fire  
sustained by what it consumes—  
your memories and desires flame  
suddenly in the tinder of the text,  
your breath the oxygen it needs.

1 December 1995

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New York is the greatest city in the world  
because the subways run all night.  
No matter what else is true  
the channels of movement are always open,

the meridians. This is true. All night.  
Do you understand? How can a city  
be great that does not circulate?  
A New Yorker has veins, arteries and the IRT.

1 December 1995

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While Lauterbach is reading in Olin  
about a woman and her father  
geese fly loudly overhead. It is four  
on a winter afternoon, almost dark,  
the geese on their way home. The river.  
Where things hide, and hunters wait.  
There is no getting away from their cry.

1 December 1995

## CARMEN SAECULARE: 1

A gala mushroom dance, floaty debts  
in flocculent foustanelles, do you read me,  
Serge, is this prance enough for thee,  
old adolescent of the heart, the midmost,  
the moo? Drink me, one said,  
and hoped the party did. Russian spoken  
the way it jumps out of the cow, a pull  
is all it takes, a little squeeze around the bag  
and our heart's in it too, you rascal you.  
It isn't ninety years ago any more,  
bridges seem to build themselves nowadays  
and there are more flags than I can recognize.  
The cruise ships keep dropping off shoppers  
who throng our exhausted living rooms.

2 December 1995

CARMEN SAECULARE: 2

Pushing the treasure maps aside, bring out  
that letter from your broker and explain it.  
I can't either. It's the way the sea looks,  
all Canaletto squiggles and a golden glare  
like mosaics from Byzantium referred to  
in a poem you'd rather not remember.  
Once they started putting opera on the radio  
war was certain. We are being prepared  
day after day for a very long song, and most  
of us will be dead by the end of it. Beauty,  
that's what it means, all our soft sweet throats  
making ruby sounds and understanding  
finally what we feel. Even what you feel  
is clear to me and I tell you a thing or two, too.

3 December 1995

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What were they hearing  
while the ground was listening to me,

step heavy, scuff a leaf  
stuck to the sole, a patter-song  
of quick sleet suddenly

and I look up and see I'm passing oaks,  
their leaves in sleet make that hiss or hush

though generally the world is quiet  
and takes what falls without a word.

3 December 1995

## WALKING ALONE

Wheat ears  
    sheavely  
    mounded by thinking

stripped of circumstance  
the logic stays.

    Be dog,  
encollared be demissed  
to haunch down hard.  
This is the world.

I walked in osier,  
a mere shive of ice  
flicked on the puddles and  
some few as well  
    mid-air, twig-uplifted  
where high water had frozen  
and thawed out from under,

transparency of the glance.  
We are left  
in things.

For all I knew  
I was walking in rare wheats,  
the gene banks of agro-financiers  
were chittering  
with profitable variation,

for all I knew the sun  
is a conspiracy  
and it went as I went,  
westward, under a cloud



I walked in osier,  
there was meaning  
raked shadow verticals,

imagine me  
owning a shadow  
and leaning it into you  
deep as the doubt in a bride's mind

things lend us

tie a knot in shadow  
and this remember

then the sun was gone  
and I was looking for a stone  
to hold the shadow down.

3 December 1995

## EPISODE

The thought pressed against the world  
like a child's brow against a window—  
all there, all that radiant  
terrifying there means only here,

inside, a guess of me, an appetite,  
the whole thick world just one whispering wish.

4 December 1995

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Becoming transparent. Letting air  
pass through. One cold  
Sunday in Brooklyn  
on my way to the Jewish baker  
the wind went through me  
and left me pervious to light.  
What I learned I learned from simple wind,  
my mind comes stumbling after.  
Five gates open and the words asleep.

4 December 1995

CARMEN SAECULARE: 3

As if in counterpoint a theme  
fell beneath another and was lost  
to all except the cunning analyst  
who counted while all others listened

and that was you, the melody  
abstracted from the incident,  
the flavor of what happened,  
the color of your eyes I never recall,

and no one knew anything at all—  
that's the one I fell in love with,  
the lost sister, the thirteenth at table,

whose voice I hear in my sleep  
and know it's you who call  
because I wake up in an empty world.

4 December 1995

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On my way to the Jewish light  
I caught a maple  
that northed my mind  
like a fold down the middle of a page

everything I said went nowhere  
but the space was pure

and answers came from every side  
to no questions.  
That's what I mean by a mountain

but what were Jews doing in a mountain?  
Isn't that always where they are coming from?

4 December 1995

---

Touch her edge. More opportunities open nowadays  
for original research. Analyze lucidly in sequences of need  
the harmonious energies men organize. Over night,  
fanciful ordinances repeal any lingering intentions  
south of noon. It is the moon. She is waiting in the street  
to give it to me. She turns around and points,  
her arm upraised making an angle with the street lamp  
of no more than seven degrees. "There it is,  
and there you are, and here I am." How much  
one hand can say, a finger vaguely twirling towards the sky.

4 December 1995

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And in this dark permission I am leased  
— an absurdity to explain myself — “no one  
lets me but I am,” “there is nothing  
to say so I sing, yet I’m no opera”  
“coffee spilling in her lap, her eyes  
serene” are things I try to say,  
to explain the word that has no meaning  
but only being, pushing me  
like light falling through Venetian blinds  
formally and orderly on any carpet  
indifferent to the previous design.  
All form is now. A hand is a kind of milk.  
Launched by unseen celebrities  
one sprawls through language. The gods  
are inferences from your remarks.  
This is the final dream of politics,  
inaccessible mountains full of yellow flowers,  
the vast stone towers of Svanetia  
where the original alphabet is stored.  
The one we dream we hear whispering  
from children busy doing what’s forbidden.  
There, that’s what I mean by permission.

4 December 1995

CARMEN SAECULARE: 4

And what carries me when I intervene,  
a gasp or two instead of breakfast,  
and frown at the lawn? Great are the Symbolists  
of old Karnak. They knew what sunlight's for.  
What if we grew our grass inside our heads  
and used the light to water that, so lush  
inside with serried thinking we'd be free  
of irritating answers and weekend guests.  
Shadow would be half the world and it would fall  
where we put it, obedient to our plausible  
architecture, upside down. Control,  
not waste. Environment, be inside.  
Outside be sand. Salt-rimmed quiet river,  
huge Sphinx with her haunches in the sea.

5 December 1995



CARMEN SAECULARE: 5

Here come the footnotes blue as rain.  
Listen to the antique violin — Francesco  
transcribed by Ezra — what we prize  
illuminates us and grants us peace.  
A fustanella is an Evzone's skirt, flounced  
like a tutu but very masculine, très turc.  
An Evzone is a Greek policeman but not now,  
name meant handsome belted or neat waisted,  
alluding to all that bombazine, I guess.  
*Song of the Birds*. Jannequin made it too,  
Dolmetsch busied himself with all such things,  
beauty. Budapest. Blue smoke from a lodge  
where hunters wake late grieving for what they killed.  
It is winter, whose trade is bare remembering.

5 December 1995

## **LAZ**

So the Laz  
that Seze says  
are butts  
of Turks' jokes

are these same Georgians!  
Far, in the disreputable distances,  
Colchis and impenetrable valleys  
crazy as birds and borders

speaking a language  
remote from others  
evidently not even related to themselves.

5 December 1995

---

The problem with lyric poetry  
is that it says everything and means nothing

and those who listen to it  
(hiding under their umbrellas,  
Munich, sun shower,  
by the window of the drugstore,  
waiting for the bus)

have to have good ears. A philosopher  
(miles and miles to the west,  
in the black forest, watching  
loggers truck romantic  
trees down to Donau-Eschingen)  
would say: if their ears are so good  
they don't need poetry,

they can hear the truth of things,  
the spheres' old tunes,  
the music of ordinary mind.

Only poets need poetry.  
It is their noisy messy gift  
to everybody, nobody,  
it is their self-important Clang,  
a road they keep building  
into the rising star,

only the poet needs poetry,  
something for him to make and bring and try to give,

the fourth wise man  
stumbling far behind.

5 December 1995

## A G I F T

The problem with lyric poetry  
is that it says everything and means nothing

and those who listen to it  
have to have good ears. A philosopher  
would say: if their ears are so good  
they don't need poetry,

they can hear the truth of things,  
the spheres' old tunes,  
the music of ordinary mind.

Only poets need poetry.  
It is their noisy messy gift  
to everybody, nobody,  
it is their self-important klang,  
a road they keep building  
into any rising star,

only the poet needs poetry,  
something to make and try to give,

the fourth Wise Man  
stumbling far behind.

## DECEMBER MORNING

I lie in the light with my eyes closed  
hearing the snow plow rush past  
I follow the bounce and jar of it  
far down the orchard road until  
its sound slips beneath your quiet breath.

6 December 1995

## R A S P B E R R Y

Raspberry, that's all I know,  
the evidence means nothing,  
there are thorns on the cane  
and mapley leaves sometimes,  
you brush through them painfully  
on the way up the shaggy slope  
over Clermont.

Here we are  
with one more obstacle, alive  
and cognitive as sin. She bends  
over the table to deliver bread.  
He crouches behind the counter  
to stow.

People wait for me  
all the time. It is their way  
of using me as a road, amazing  
how many places I go. They go  
and I stay, it is that yellow stripe  
down my back that keeps me stuck.

That keeps me useful where I am.  
Raspberry inside and ashen out.  
Like the viper Borrow picked up  
and handled on the road, the one  
that taught him every language  
but most of all the language of the goers,  
the Gypsy men, the travelers in stars,

the line is golden, lies there, reasons  
with the four directions. Following  
it closely I am alive, I am instruction  
folded in upon itself and listening.  
Inside the ashes fire. Inside the fire

a city. Inside the city a tree,  
*the ends of the earth upon me!*

Things teach things. Nobody  
teaches nothing. I have to learn  
that all by myself.

6 December 1995

CARMEN SAECULARE: 6

Simon likes to exaggerate. It is an opera  
he is always singing. It is comfortable  
to hear him complain, the world's all right  
if ol' Simon's bitching. There is a lyric  
hidden in the shoddiest conditions,  
the most humiliating interviews  
come out like Act One finales, glasses  
smashing, choruses revving up, tenor  
fibrillating with high C oaths. *The Sunken  
Gondola* means his car won't start,  
*Sigismondo Maledetto* means he's late to Mass.  
*Der Unterrgang der Menschheit* means it's snowing.  
As long as people go on exaggerating,  
language and art are safe from liberation.

7 December 1995



CARMEN SAECULARE: 7

Break the raft I want to walk across  
with my feet on the bottom and the water  
up to my balls, I want to feel the river  
one last time before the trees  
come down and get me. I will get there.  
I will vanish into the shine of gold  
when sun comes out after rain  
and the jungle smokes. And far away  
I will be taking measures to help you cross.  
Don't ask me what they are yet, I won't know  
till all the hairs on the inside of my thigh are dry.

7 December 1995